

**CHRAJ/ COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT PROJECT LAUNCH ON CHILD EARLY FORCED MARRIAGE**  
**WORKING SESSION WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND QUEEN MOTHERS - TAMALE- 18<sup>TH</sup>- 19<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2016**

**OPENING REMARKS**

**BY JOSEPH WHITTAL, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, CHRAJ**

Naa,  
Queen mothers,  
Other Traditional Leaders present,  
Representatives of CSOS,  
Distinguished Participants.

It is indeed with great pleasure on behalf of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) that I welcome you all to this Workshop and project Launch on CHILD EARLY and FORCED MARRIAGE. Your impressive attendance gives hope and encouragement that working together, the Commission in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Traditional Leaders, Queen Mothers and other key stakeholders will if not eradicating the practice of CEFM in Northern Ghana make a huge dent in reducing the practice which is very harmful to the development of girls in this part of the country.

As Ghana's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) the Commission has a constitutional responsibility to lead in the fight against harmful traditional practices generally and it has been pursuing this in respect of similar harmful cultural and traditional practices such as Trokosi, female genital mutilation and the stigmatization of elderly and sometimes menopausal females on allegations of witchcraft in the past and even as at now.

This time attention is being focused on the child early and forced marriages. This is a practice with serious human rights implications for the girl child in particular. In the course of the various presentations by our renowned resource persons who are drawn from our own communities here in the North as well as within other areas in Ghana as well as internationally, the facts, figures and the impact of this practice will be laid bare for us to know and reconsider its continuation as a traditional practice in our communities.

It is my hope that as participants desirous of the best for our communities we would seriously look at the issue carefully and commit

to undertaking those actions and decisions in our communities that would impact positively on the future of our girls who would one day become very useful persons in our communities and in Ghana because of the actions we committed to take today.

The issue of CEFM is a global one. Recent UN statistics estimate that by 2020 140 million girls, or about 39,000 girls a day will become child brides. Out of the 14 million girls who are married early every year, 7 million reside in the Commonwealth.

Because the Commonwealth and national human rights institutions consider CEFM to constitute a serious human rights concern, the national human rights institutions in the Commonwealth including CHRAJ jointly met and signed a Declaration, called THE KIGALI DECLARATION in the year 2015 committing ourselves to go beyond rhetoric and ensure that concrete action steps are taken to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriages in the Commonwealth.

Having a robust dialogue with traditional leaders and Queen Mothers as well as other traditional structures who are the custodians of tradition and culture and the need to commit to concrete action steps in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Commission on ways by which the practice can gradually be confronted in the communities in Northern Region is seen as good practice which has worked well in other parts of Africa and can also be considered here.

I am convinced that if we carry out a dispassionate dialogue these two days on the issue we would find durable answers or solutions to CEFM in Northern Ghana where the statistics indicate to be the Regions with the highest prevalence rate of CEFM

Thank you, and I wish you fruitful deliberations.